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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BY FRANK B. NOYES,
PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PROBABLY no institution is more widely known by name than The Associated Press and, on the other hand, more vaguely understood by the public generally as to its organization and its functions. For whatever cause this may be, that it is a fact is daily apparent.

The Associated Press is an association of something over eight hundred and fifty newspapers, operating under a charter of the State of New York as a mutual and co-operative organization for the interchange and collection of news. Under the terms of its charter "the corporation is not to make a profit nor to make or declare dividends and is not to engage in the business of selling intelligence nor traffic in the same."

In other words, The Associated Press is simply a common agent of its members by which they arrange an interchange of the news that each collects, and is bound by its membership obligation to contribute for the common use of its fellow-members and also as the agency through which reports of foreign and certain classes of domestic happenings are collected and distributed to the newspapers served by the organization.

The fact that in the present year we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the first nation-wide co-operative and non-profit-making news-gathering organization in the world seems to make the publication of something respecting it timely.

The Associated Press is in no wise the master of the newspapers constituting its membership; it is distinctly their servant.

Its Board of Directors is composed of active newspaper men chosen at annual meetings by the membership and, in an experience running through twenty years of intimate connection with the present organization and also that of the older Illinois corporation, I have never known an instance in all the changing personnel of Boards of Directors when there was any departure from the most rigid observance of the highest obligations of trusteeship and disregard of private and selfish interests. The President, Vice-Presidents, and members of the Board of Directors serve without salaries.

The Associated Press of to-day is the outcome of a many-year struggle between two opposing systems. One, that of news-gathering concerns with private or limited ownership which dealt at arm's-length with newspapers to which they sold news at such profit as might be secured, and over which the newspapers who bought from them had no more control than over the paper-mill supplying them with print paper.

The other system is based on the theory that a powerful, privately owned and controlled news-gathering agency is a menace to the press and people.

Determined to establish an agency subject only to the control of the newspapers for whom it acted, in 1893 a group of Western men composing the Western Associated Press began a fight to attain this end, and since that time a contest between these two opposing principles has been waged. In asserting that The Associated Press, as to-day constituted, is the servant and agent only of the newspapers for which it acts, I have no thought of minimizing the tremendous importance of the work it does as such an agent, but wish simply to emphasize the thought that properly speaking it has no entity of its own, no mission save to serve its members.

Its members are scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Canada to the Gulf, and represent every possible shade of political belief, religious faith, and economic sympathy. It is obvious that The Associated Press can have no partisan nor factional bias, no religious affiliation, no capitalistic nor pro-labor trend.

Its function is simply to furnish its members with a truthful, clean, comprehensive, non-partisan—and this in its broadest sense—report of the news of the world as ex-

peditionously as is compatible with accuracy and as economically as possible.

To do this the newspapers composing its membership contribute first, the news of their localities and second, weekly assessments of money aggregating about \$3,000,000 per annum, with which an extensive system of leased wires is maintained (22,000 miles of wire in the daytime and 28,000 miles of wire at night), bureaus in the principal American cities supplementing and collating the news of local newspapers and bureaus for the original collection of news throughout the world.

The volume of the news report to members varies greatly, ranging from five hundred words daily by telegraph or telephone to papers able to utilize but a small amount of general news matter, to more than fifty thousand words daily or thirty-five newspaper columns in the more important cities.

The method of collecting foreign news has been greatly changed in recent years. Formerly The Associated Press collected its foreign service in London, receiving the news there of the Reuter Company, of the Wolff Agency of Germany, and of the Havas Agency of France with smaller affiliated agencies in Italy and Spain.

The objection to this method was that the news as received in London was alleged to be impressed with an English bias—in any event it was concededly not collected from an American viewpoint.

To meet this criticism The Associated Press has established regular bureaus of its own in all the great news centers, and now maintains offices and staffs in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Tokio, Peking, Mexico City, and Havana, in addition to hundreds of individual correspondents scattered throughout the world.

It is probable that in the foreign news field the extraordinary genius of Melville E. Stone, the General Manager of The Associated Press, has been most strikingly exhibited. Just prior to the Russo-Japanese War Mr. Stone secured from the Czar of Russia the abolition of the censorship, and newspaper men still remember the remarkable frankness with which the Russian Government gave out the news of Russia's reverses in that conflict.

Orders expediting the messages of The Associated Press were issued at his instance by the German, French, Italian,

and Russian Governments, and as a result it has come to be common for European capitals to get the first news of Continental events through Associated Press reports cabled back from New York.

One beneficial result coming from this more direct relationship is to be found in the minimizing of the ill effect of the occasional outbreak of some utterly inconsequential German, French, English, or Japanese "yellow" sporadically abusing the United States and its people.

Formerly profound significance of a wide-spread hostility was attached to such outpourings. With the closer understanding that comes from more intimate knowledge, we now understand the relative importance of the newspapers of other countries as we are able to weigh and grade our own.

The disadvantage of lack of news touch is strikingly apparent in the relations of the United States with the Central and South American nations. These countries secure their news of the United States by way of Europe, and it consists mainly of murders, lynchings, and embezzlements. The antipathy to the United States by the people of these countries is undoubtedly largely due to the false perspective given by their newspapers. If in truth we were the kind of people they are led to believe we are they would be fully justified in their attitude.

It has been the aim of those intrusted with the management of The Associated Press to secure as its representatives both at home and abroad men of high character and attainments, and it may, I think, be fairly assumed that the reputation for accuracy and fairness that its service enjoys is largely to be attributed to an unusual measure of success in this endeavor.

While The Associated Press is generally held in good esteem, I would not be understood as indicating that it has been exempt from criticism and attack.

If in a campaign all the candidates, or their managers or press agents did not accuse The Associated Press of the grossest partisanship as against the particular candidacy in which they were interested, those bearing the responsibilities of the service would feel convinced that something was radically wrong and would look with suspicion on the report themselves.

This is but human nature. During the last campaign for

the Presidential nominations every candidate either in person or by proxy expressed his conviction that The Associated Press was favorable to somebody else.

Mr. Wilson's press agent asserted that our service was pro-Clark, and in the opinion of Speaker Clark we had sold out to the Wilson people. Mr. Taft's managers felt that he was not being given a fair show and Mr. Roosevelt was firm in his conviction that the avenues of information had been choked to his disadvantage.

Of course later we know that Mr. Wilson does not share the only-for-publication views of his press agent and Speaker Clark is as emphatic in his withdrawal as in his hasty charges. Mr. Taft's managers realize that The Associated Press cannot report speeches that he does not make, and Mr. Roosevelt must see a humorous side to the suggestion that any one has interfered with his getting a fairly adequate representation on the first page.

With all this, however, goes a fundamental misunderstanding of the functions of The Associated Press. The individual correspondent or reporter for a given newspaper or a small group of newspapers having a common bias may be permitted to indulge in partisanship or in propaganda.

This is absolutely not to be permitted in The Associated Press. No bias of any sort can be allowed. Our function is to supply our members with news, not views; with news as it happens—not as we may want it to happen. Intensely as its management may sympathize with any movement, no propaganda in its behalf can be tolerated. Very jealously indeed does the membership guard against their agency going outside its allotted duties and argus-eyed is the censorship of every handler of our "copy."

It is not, naturally, to be claimed that no mistakes are made. They are made and will be made. But in the very nature of the business, with the heart so worn upon the sleeve, detection very swiftly follows, and the mistakes are few and far between.

The desire to enlist The Associated Press in propaganda or advocacy is usually to be found at the bottom of criticisms of its service. Added to this often is misinformation as to the real facts and sometimes, though happily rarely, actual malice.

The service from Russia, for example, has been harshly

criticized by some who thought that the province of The Associated Press was to undertake a crusade against the Russian Government because of its anti-Semitic attitude. Our theory of our obligations is that we should report the facts as they occur, without fear or favor, but that it is no part of our duty to draw indictments save as the facts alone are damning.

The case of the Koreans charged with a plot to assassinate Governor-General Terauchi has recently been much discussed.

These Koreans were almost all converted Christians and the American missionaries in Korea were naturally intensely interested in the matter.

It was freely alleged that The Associated Press, unduly influenced by the Japanese Government, had suppressed the fact that these Koreans had made confessions, implicating American missionaries as accessories to the plot, and had subsequently retracted these confessions, asserting that they had been extorted by atrocious torture inflicted by the Japanese police the intimation being also that the missionaries were in peril by reason of the repudiated confessions.

Based on this some of the missionary authorities here became much perturbed, and indeed one of the great New York papers printed news and editorial articles criticizing The Associated Press for the suppression of the matter.

As a matter of fact an inspection of the news service received by The Associated Press and distributed to its members showed that it carried the full facts; the confessions, the implications of the missionaries, the allegations of torture, the fact that the allegation of torture was believed by the missionaries, and also the fact that the Japanese denied the torture stories and attached no credence whatever to the prisoners' statements implicating the missionaries.

On learning the real situation the New York newspaper in question promptly printed an ample *amende honorable*, but I do not doubt that many still ignorant of the retraction feel that The Associated Press was guilty of some dereliction.

Another cause of frequent misapprehension is in the general tendency of newspaper readers to attribute anything seen in print to The Associated Press, and it is constantly

necessary to explain that some violently partisan or inaccurate article was the work of a "special" and not a part of our service.

Away back in the middle of the last century an alliance, offensive and defensive, existed between the old New York Associated Press, a news-selling organization owned by seven New York papers, and the Western Union Telegraph Company under the terms of which the New York Associated Press dealt solely with the Western Union and the Western Union in turn gave discriminating rates and advantages to the New York Associated Press.

Although this arrangement (in the light of to-day a very improper one) was abolished more than thirty years ago, many people think that it still exists and occasionally some one arises fiercely to denounce this unholy alliance.

The simple truth is that The Associated Press has during all these thirty years and more paid exactly what other news associations pay, and that the rates charged by the telegraph companies for the facilities furnished us are greatly in excess of those charged individual newspapers and still more than those charged stockholders having leased wires.

The Associated Press leases wires, many thousands of miles of them, from the Western Union, the Postal, the American Telegraph and Telephone Company, and from several of the independent telephone companies.

The first three have a common basic rate, charging us \$24 a mile a year in the daytime and \$12 a mile a year at night. For exactly the same wire they charge an individual newspaper \$20 and \$10, respectively, and a stockbroker gets a still further reduction.

Far from receiving discriminatory favors, The Associated Press feels that it is being distinctly and heavily discriminated against.

In these days when all transactions on a large scale are being subjected to so rigid a scrutiny it is natural that so conspicuous a mark of public attention as is The Associated Press should not find itself immune from critical inspection.

From time to time some voice is raised denouncing The Associated Press in the same breath both as a monopoly and because it is not a monopoly, and insisting that it become a monopoly by admitting to its membership all desiring its service; the theory being that in some way the

activities of the association impress it with a public use and subject it to the obligation of a common carrier to serve all comers.

From an ethical standpoint only, then, is there anything improper, unsafe, or unwise in a group of newspapers, large or small, associating themselves together to do a thing that each must otherwise do separately and of reserving to themselves the right to determine to what extent the membership of such a group shall be enlarged?

It does not seem possible to hold fairly that a newspaper in New York may not join with one in Chicago and one in Philadelphia to maintain a common correspondent in Washington without making it obligatory on these three newspapers to share the fruits of their enterprise with other New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia newspapers.

If in addition they arrange that each shall supply the others with the news of its home city, is it within the bounds of reason that they are required to furnish to competitors the same facilities?

I give this illustration because that is exactly the relation of the newspapers composing The Associated Press—the scale only being enlarged.

The obligations of a common carrier are, however, in no wise dependent on the magnitude of its transactions. The ferry sculled across a stream is just as much impressed with a public use as is the Pennsylvania Railroad. Each is a common carrier. It is the nature of the transaction and not its size that determines its obligations. As respects the question of common carriership, what is right for three to do is proper for three hundred or for eight hundred to do.

To compel The Associated Press to assume an entity of its own and to serve all comers would, in my judgment, bring about a condition fraught with the gravest dangers to the freedom of the press and in turn to the freedom of the people.

At present about one-third of the daily newspapers of the country are represented by membership in The Associated Press.

There are a number of concerns engaged in the collection and sale of general news to non-members of The Associated Press, and in one way or another they supply their customers with what are declared to be satisfactory services.

In no wise desiring to become anything approaching a monopoly, The Associated Press has avoided even the appearance of any competitive price rivalry, admitting additional members solely on the ground of a common benefit to the members of a co-operative institution.

If by some occult reasoning The Associated Press could be held as a common carrier, these news-selling organizations would be wiped out and The Associated Press would, if the end sought for was accomplished, become a real monopoly and the incentive for co-operation no longer existing, it would naturally drift into a concern for pecuniary profit, in private ownership and subject to private control.

No more dangerous situation can well be imagined than the passing of the control of the greatest news-gathering and news-disseminating agency of the world from the hands of co-operating newspapers to the control of some individual interested in manipulating the news—the master and not the servant of the newspapers.

Because this danger would be so grave it will not come, but for another reason also, a very basic reason.

There can be no monopoly in news.

The day that it becomes apparent that a monopoly in collecting and distributing news exists, that day, in some way, by some method individual newspapers or groups of newspapers will take up the work of establishing a service for themselves, independent of outside control.

The news of the world is open to him who will go for it. Any one willing to expend the energy, the time, and the money to approach it may dip from the well of truth.

The news service of The Associated Press does not consist of its leased wires or its offices. Its soul is in the personal service of human men, of men with eyes to see, with ears to hear, with hands to write, and with brains to understand, of men who are proud when they succeed, humiliated when they fail and resentful when maligned. The telegraph wires are but the blind instruments of this service, though the wire has brought the uttermost parts of the world marvelously close. These human entities are ranging the world to send word of its doings, of its rejoicings, and its sorrowings to satisfy the thirst of the people for intelligence of the march of events.

The news service of The Associated Press of the horror

of Martinique was not the event itself. It was the personal service of a man who at the first hint of the disaster that had wiped out a population took his orders, chartered a boat, and went to Martinique, where no correspondent still lived, and sent a story, *his* story of the great tragedy, wrecking his health by the effort required.

To get this report, this "news," was open to any one.

To get it cost the members of The Associated Press more than \$30,000 in addition to the human wastage and prodigious effort.

It was a part of the day's work.

And as to-day devoted men labor and die in order that the members of The Associated Press, an organization that neither owns nor prints a newspaper, may lay before their readers a fair picture of the world's happenings, so always will these and other men serve nobly and die bravely that the world may have tidings of sport and festival, of birth and death, of Congress and Parliament, of battle and plague, of shipwreck and rescue.

FRANK B. NOYES.